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SUBJECT: YEKATERINBURG OUTREACH TO MUSLIMS EXPANDS - IFTAR 2009

¶1. The U.S. Consulate General in Yekaterinburg observed the end of Ramadan by hosting an Iftar for 40 prominent Muslim religious leaders, business people, politicians, diplomats, journalists, teachers, and NGO activists on September 15, 2009 at the Consul General's residence. The Consulate's guests included members of the Tatar, Bashkir, Chechen, Ingush, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Azeri, and Tajik ethnic groups that make their homes in Yekaterinburg and Sverdlovsk oblast. For the first time, we extended our outreach to Muslim politicians and businessmen, including several oblast and city дума deputies. Participants warmly received President Obama's Ramadan message. The representative of the Sverdlovsk Oblast Council of Muslim Elders, Rais Nurimanov - one of the most respected Muslim leaders in Sverdlovsk - called for integration of the Muslim community in the Urals. Nail Shaymartdanov, Vice Speaker of the Sverdlovsk Oblast Duma, spoke about developing the community's international cooperation.

¶2. Interestingly, although representatives of various organizations that adhere to either the Central Spiritual Directorate of Muslims (TsDUM, headed by Supreme Mufti Talgat Tadjuddin of Ufa) or the Council of Muftis of Russia (headed by Mufti Ravil Gaynutdin) came to the Consulate Iftar, imams and muftis did not. We were not able to contact official representative of TsDUM for the Urals Federal District or Mufti Sibagatulla (also TsDUM). The Mufti of Central Asian Muslims in Yekaterinburg and Imam Mukhametzyanov (both of Gaynutdin's wing) at first confirmed their participation but cancelled the day of our Iftar, citing the need to lead prayers at their mosques due to the large numbers of people (in the thousands) showing up for evening prayers. Several representatives of the Spiritual Directorate of Muslims of Asian Russia did join us. Their official leader in the Urals, Ruslan Nurmametov, seems to have a broad network of contacts with political leaders, NGOs, and academic and cultural institutions. With support from regional and federal authorities this group has been promoting Islam through classes on world cultures and religions.

¶3. According to official statistics (based on the 2002 census and legal migration numbers) about 500,000 Muslims live in Sverdlovsk oblast, mainly ethnic Tatars and Bashkirs. The Muslim population is growing with the influx of labor migrants from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. Local NGOs working with migrants estimate the Muslim population of Sverdlovsk oblast at 800,000 to 1 million, with 200,000 to 300,000 living in Yekaterinburg. While the official number of migrants from these countries is said not to exceed 126,000 per year, Tagir Samatov, former Mufti of the Urals Federal District (TsDUM), believes that 4.5-5 million Muslims live in the Urals region. There are about 30 functioning mosques in Sverdlovsk oblast, the majority led by ethnic Tatars. The oblast government actively supports interfaith dialogue, and has facilitated construction and renovation of mosques in and around Yekaterinburg.

¶4. About ten of our guests were female. Muslim women in the Urals seem to be active, open-minded, and collaborative. Nurzida Bensgier has been in charge of the oblast Interethnic Informational center for years. Closely cooperating with the

entire Urals Muslim community, she helps migrant workers from Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan. Rosalia Akhmatova heads the Union of Muslim Women, which was formed in 2008. Among other activities, the Union promotes Muslim fashion and is involved in educational and cultural programs at different mosques. Oblast TV offers weekly features on Muslim community activities.

15. This year's Iftar provided new insights into the life of the Muslim community in the Urals and strengthened the Consulate's links with local Muslim leaders and community activists. Our guests suggested several ideas to foster interfaith dialogue and tolerance in the region. Guests appreciated the attention paid to the Muslim community and expressed the hope that we would continue the tradition.

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